

# GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

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## The Curious Paternity of Abraham Lincoln WAS HE A SMOKY MOUNTAIN BOY?

Rumors have persisted since the late 19th century that Abraham Lincoln was not the son of Thomas Lincoln but was actually the illegitimate son of a Smoky Mountain man, Abram Enloe. The story of Lincoln's paternity was first related in 1893 article in the *Charlotte Observer* by a writer who called himself a "Student of History." The myth was later perpetuated by several other Western North Carolina writers, most notably James H. Cathey in a book entitled *Truth Is Stranger than Fiction: True Genesis of a Wonderful Man* published first in 1899. Here is the story as it was told by Cathey and "Student of History."



Around 1800, Abram Enloe, a resident of Rutherford County, N. C., brought into his household an orphan, Nancy Hanks, to be a family servant. She was about ten or twelve years old at the time. When Nancy was about eighteen or twenty, the family moved to Swain County, settling in Oconoluftee at the edge of the Smokies. Enloe's daughter, who was also named Nancy, eloped with a Kentucky man named Thompson, against the wishes of her family. Soon after the elopement, it became apparent that Nancy Hanks was pregnant. Mrs. Enloe was understandably very unhappy with this state of affairs.

There are two versions of what happened at this point. In one version, Nancy Hanks had her baby in the Enloe home or perhaps a neighbor's home in Oconoluftee. In the second version, she was removed from the home before the birth of her son. In both versions, the daughter, Nancy Thompson, who had reconciled with her parents, came home to visit. On her return to Kentucky, she took Nancy Hanks either pregnant or with her infant son, back to Kentucky to live with her. Soon after her removal to Kentucky, Hanks met and married Thomas Lincoln, the man who was presumed to be Abraham Lincoln's father.

The theory that Abraham Lincoln was the son of Abram Enloe was bolstered by several factors. First there was the obvious similarity in the first names. Enloe was a tall, dark-haired man weighing between 200 and 300 lbs. Although Lincoln was not a heavy man, he was tall with dark hair. "Student of History" traveled to the Enloe family farm and met with Abram Enloe's son, Wesley Enloe. He was the youngest of about sixteen children and did not know the Nancy Hanks story

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*Judge for yourself: does that famous jawline reveal Lincoln's true paternity?*

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## The Curious Paternity of Abraham Lincoln, continued



*Family resemblance?*  
LEFT: Wesley Enloe:  
Half brother of  
Abraham Lincoln?



CENTER: Julia Enloe:  
Niece of Abraham  
Lincoln?



personally, but apparently several of the brothers and Wesley's daughter Julia resembled Lincoln. Wesley himself did not look as much like Lincoln as other family members, but "Student of History" did notice a resemblance in a photograph of a younger Wesley. Both photographs of Wesley and Julia from Cathey's book are reproduced here in the *Colloquy*. James Coggins in *Abraham Lincoln: A North Carolinian* added the additional theory that Lincoln's birth date had been falsified by biographers to hide the fact that he was born before Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln were married.

Cathey also gathered testimony from several people who had second- or third-hand knowledge of the events that occurred earlier in the century. A local merchant, Joseph A. Collins, related to Cathey a story that had been told to him by Judge Gilmore of Texas. Gilmore had heard the story from Phillis Wells who, at the time that Lincoln was born, was a traveling salesman. In his travels he often stayed with Abram Enloe in Oconoluftee. One day when Wells arrived at Enloe's house, he reported that Enloe said: "My wife is mad; about to tear up the place; she has not spoken to me in two weeks, and I wanted to tell you about it before you went into the house." When asked what the problem was, Enloe replied that the problem was with Nancy Hanks, the hired girl. On a subsequent visit, Enloe told him that he had sent Nancy Hanks to a family near Jonathans Creek to have her baby which she named Abraham. According to Wells, Hanks was then sent

to live with relatives in Kentucky where she met and married Lincoln.

William E. Barton analyzes various theories about the father of Abraham Lincoln in his book, *The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln*. Barton identifies seven alternative fathers for Lincoln. In addition to Enloe, the candidates for Lincoln's father include Abe Enlow of Kentucky, John C. Calhoun, and Andrew Marshall, adopted son of Chief Justice John Marshall. Barton rejects them all in favor of Thomas Lincoln. Apparently the marriage certificate of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks had been located confirming that Lincoln and Hanks were married some three years before the birth of their son, Abraham.

Why did the rumor that Lincoln was the son of Abram Enloe surface in the late 19th century? It is difficult to know the reason at this point but it may have been because, after his death, Lincoln was idolized in the United States. An opportunity to link Western North Carolina to Lincoln would have been seen as advantageous by the local writers. Apparently Lincoln himself did not talk much about his childhood and family background, leading to extensive speculation. Some of the speculation may have been the result of the supposition that a man as brilliant as Lincoln could not have been the child of unschooled Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. Adding to the confusion, there may have been another Nancy Hanks, not Lincoln's mother, but a young woman who had the unfortunate experience of delivering an illegitimate child fathered by Abram Enloe.

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To read more about the discussion of Abram Enloe as the father of Abraham Lincoln, see the following sources.

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Barton, William E. *The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln*. NY, George H. Doran Co., 1920.

Cathey, James H. *Truth is Stranger than Fiction; True Genesis of a Wonderful Man*. Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Pub. Co., 1899. Later reprinted with additional information as *The Genesis of Lincoln*.

Coggins, James Caswell. *Abraham Lincoln: A North Carolinian: A True and Thrilling Story Never Before Published: Told by a Third Cousin of President Lincoln ... A Buncombe County, North Carolina, Tradition*. Asheville: Advocate Pub. Co., 1925. Later reprinted as *Abraham Lincoln: A North Carolinian with Proof*.

Student of History. "Abram Lincoln's Parents. Another Chapter of the Story. Local Tradition of the Great Emancipator's North Carolina Ancestry and A Visit to the Enloe Homestead—Tracing a Family Resemblance among the Enloes to Lincoln." *The Charlotte Observer* (September 17, 1893): 2. See also related *Observer* articles: September 10, 1893.

## New on the Smokies Bookshelf

## NON-FICTION

Clabough, Casey. *The Warrior's Path: Reflections along an Ancient Route*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007.

Frome, Michael. *Rebel on the Road: And Why I Was Never Neutral*. Kirksville, Mo. : Truman State University Press, 2007.

Hall, Karen J. *Building the Blue Ridge Parkway*. (Images of America series) Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.

Kavanagh, James. *Great Smoky Mountains Birds: An Introduction to Over 140 Species*. Phoenix: Waterford Press, 2008.

Kavanagh, James. *Great Smoky Mountains Trees & Wildflowers: An Introduction to Over 140 Familiar Species of Trees, Shrubs, and Wildflowers*. Phoenix: Waterford Press, 2008.

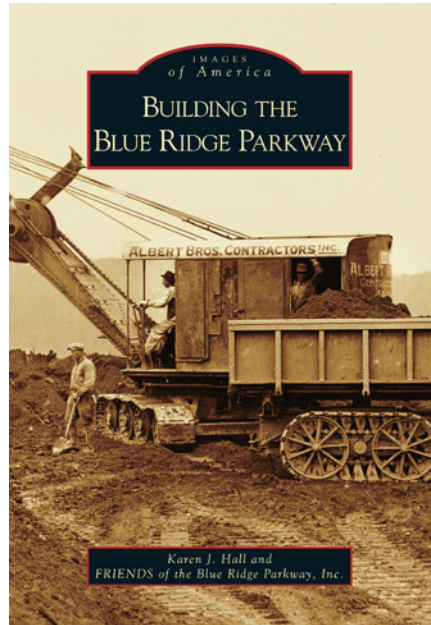
LaFevre, Kat and John. *Scavenger Hike Adventures: Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. Guilford, CT: Falcon, 2007.

Lea, Bill. *Cades Cove: Window to a Secret World*. Johnson City, TN: Mountain Trail Press, 2007.

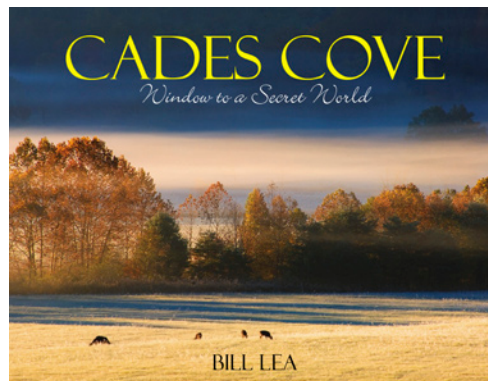
Miller, Joe. *100 Classic Hikes in North Carolina*. Seattle, WA : Mountaineers Books, 2007.

Minetor, Randi. *Great Smoky Mountains National Park Pocket Guide*. Guilford, CT: Falcon, 2008.

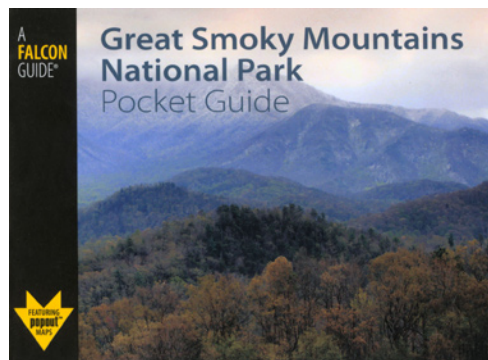
Sturgis, Amy H. *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007.



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## FICTION

Barton, Beverly. *The Murder Game*. NY: Zebra, 2008.

Barton, Beverly. *Raintree: Sanctuary*. NY: Silhouette, 2007.

Caldwell, Wayne. *Cataloochee: A Novel*. NY: Random House, 2007.

Carson, Jo. *Teller Tales: Histories* ["What Sweet Lips Can Do" and "Men of Their Time"]. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007

## JUVENILE

Bowes, John. *The Trail of Tears: Removal in the South*. NY: Chelsea House, 2007.

Heermance, Sloan. *Venture to the Smokies: A Teddy Bear Explores Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. Eugene, OR: Ventures Adventures, 2007.

Kent, Deborah. *The Trail of Tears*. NY: Children's Press, 2007.

Madden, Kerry. *Jessie's Mountain*. NY: Viking, 2008.

Maynard, Charles W. *Going to the Great Smoky Mountains*. Helena, MT: Farcountry Press, 2008.

O'Connor, Barbara. *Greetings from Nowhere*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

## The “Mystery Building in the Sugarlands” Revisited

In the previous issue of the *Great Smoky Mountains Colloquy*, the article “Mystery Building in the Sugarlands” contained a description of an obscure stone building situated along Big Branch in an isolated section of the Sugarlands. A few cursory inquiries into the history of the building yielded little satisfactory information, so the editors of the *Colloquy* asked our readers to hazard a guess as to its origin.

The first response to our request was from a reader who had been told that the building in question was once used as either a camp or a clearinghouse for the handling of conscientious objectors during World War II. While the conjecture is plausible, we felt that the building was too small and rather remote to have been used for any such administrative purposes.

Several readers responded with the suggestion that the building was part of one of the many Civilian Conservation Corp camps operating in the Smokies during the Roosevelt administration. One such CCC camp was in operation in the lower elevations of the Sugarlands near where the current Sugarlands Trail turns north toward Cherokee Orchard. Aside from the fact that the mystery building is a rather long way from the CCC camp, we could find no record of the CCC having a building further up in the Sugarlands.

Other readers suggested that our mystery building was a residence for young women employed as teachers at a nearby school. A few years after founding the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School in Gatlinburg, the fraternity opened a second school



(PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB LOCHBAUM)

in the Sugarlands. The teachers’ cottage that accompanied the school was a stone house very similar in structure to our mystery building. However, after studying pictures of the Pi Beta Phi teachers’ cottage, it is clear from differences in construction that the mystery building is not that used by the school. The teachers’ cottage, for example, has its chimney placed clearly in the middle of the house while the chimney on the mystery building is attached at the end.

In our opinion, the most plausible suggestion came from one gentleman who believes the stone structure was a hunting and fishing lodge built by the Champion Fiber Company to entertain business associates. The remains of the mystery building are characteristic of what one would expect of a hunting lodge in the mountains. It consists of one large room except for a lean-to kitchen affixed to the outer back wall and on one corner of the building are the foundations for what appears to be a large porch of the kind one would expect to find in a lodge.

This evidence is corroborated by a descendent of Sugarlands residents who commented to us that his grandfather used this cabin when taking visitors to hunt and fish in the mountains. Another respondent also acknowledged that the building was a hunting lodge but added that it was used to entertain politician and civic and business leaders in the effort to secure support for the establishment of the national park.

Thanks to all of our readers for their responses to our query about the mystery building. If any other evidence comes to light, please email us at [smokies@utk.edu](mailto:smokies@utk.edu).



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